

The trials of Jim Hopper by RedHatMeg

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Summary: Jim Hopper is a policeman. His duty is to protect others. Yet he failed to do it. Now someone is going to use it against him and the chief will need help. But what if he had done something unforgivable?

1. Prologue

I've had tons of ideas for Hopper-centric fics, but after some time I remembered certain scene from the Season 1 finale and I wanted to address it in fanfiction.

And so I decided to write this fic. For now, I can't say much, aside, maybe that Jim is here for a hell of a ride.

Prologue

"You let me die!"

With wide opened eyes, chief Jim Hopper was observing the phantom lying before him on the floor. Normally timid and friendly Bob "The Brain" Newby was now angrily shouting at the chief. One couldn't blame him – after all nobody would be happy with guts coming out of their open belly. Covered in his own blood, Bob presented himself the way Hopper remembered him in moment of his untimely death; and the way the policeman was seeing him often in his memory.

But there was one slightly different detail – Bob's eyes. They were open, filled with hatred and glowing in ominous red light. There was no room for mercy or friendliness in those eyes. Not for Hopper, anyway.

"You've had one job! One, fucking job, Jim! Keep everyone safe! And you couldn't do it!" The ghost stood up and slowly, holding his guts, he started to walk towards the chief.

Hopper felt the need to say something. But what could he say to the man he failed to save?

"Bob, I'm-" He began, but the ghost cut in:

"-sorry?! You being sorry won't bring me back to life! You being sorry won't change the fact that you left me to die!" He stopped and his expression changed from angry to sad. A moment later tears ran down his cheeks. "What have I done to you to deserve it?! Or did you decide to sacrifice me?!"

"It's not like that, Bob..." Hopper started again.

The ghost gave a cheerless laugh.

"But it is, Jim. After all, who would care if something happened to Bob the Brain? Ever since middle school I was only just that to you – a funny, little man. So you let me die..." Bob said it in quiet, yet perfectly hearable voice. Somehow this was worse than him yelling.

"Bob..."

"And now Joyce is grieving. Didn't you ruin enough lives? You had to do it also to Joyce?" Bob's voice was now hollow as he went on: "You really are a black hole, Jim. You suck everything good and turn it to ash. Just like you did to me."

"Bob..."

"GO TO HELL, HOPPER!" Newby screamed at the top of his lungs and his red eyes glowed with blinding red light. And then, a bit quieter he added: "That's where you belong."

This was the moment, when his consciousness decided he had enough. And so Hopper woke up with cold sweat on his forehead. It took him a couple of seconds to realize that he was in his bed and it was 3:30.

Nightmares were nothing new to him. He had nightmares before. Sometimes they were about gruesome murders he was investigating back in the city. Other times they were about his little girl dying of cancer. Nights like this one, when he was waking up sweating, were happening sometimes and he was left sleepless until morning. Generally he spent it with six-pack of beer or tons of cigarettes. Sometimes he was even doing something stupid and embarrassing, like calling Diane while drunk (frankly, he wasn't doing it anymore, because neither one of them was comfortable with that afterwards).

He already had an impressive baggage of traumatic experiences, but it got even worse in past two years. Crime and disease seemed pretty mundane in comparison to government conspiracy and demons from hell spawning underneath Hawkins and claiming victim after victim. Who needed nightmares when something like that was an actual

reality?

And so his nightmares started to be about a twisted version of Hawkins, Will Byers in cocoon and some kind of shapeless entity wanting to take over Hopper's town.

And also about Bob Newby being eaten up by demodogs.

Right now Jim Hopper was dreaming of smoke. He opened his nightstand drawer and took from it the pack of cigarettes. After couple of seconds he managed to find the lighter. It wasn't long before he was standing outside his cabin with his jacket over his pajamas, and feeling warm smoke inside his body. In the silence of the snowy wilderness, he had time to think.

He was coming back to this moment many times: the moment when he pointed the rifle not at demodogs attacking poor Bob, but at the one demodog that launched itself to attack Hopper. And so Bob Newby gave his last breath, becoming the feast for monsters. Hopper couldn't do anything for him anymore. He could only took Joyce to safety.

Back then, in the lab, everything was happening so fast. And he had to act fast, if he wanted to keep everyone safe. It was only when they've all got out and hidden in Byers household and that he had a moment to deal with Bob's death. He found Joyce in her bedroom, sitting with blanket over her shoulders. He went in but didn't say anything. He knew that nothing he could possibly say at the moment would ease her pain. So he just sat on the floor and tried to give her time to grief, at the same time showing her that she wasn't alone.

But in that moment alone with her he was thinking about Bob's death too. Bob the Brain was a good, brave man. He did tell Hopper to not wait for him if things go south, so he knew the risk... But he was still a civilian. And policemen are supposed to not let civilians get hurt. It was bad enough that he didn't go back for doctor Owens...

And then there was the subject of Barbara Holland. Even after the story about gas leak went out, her parents was looking at him with resentment. And who could have blame them? Certainly not he who lost a child of his own. And if they knew what he had known, they

would probably resent him even more for hiding the truth. In fact, in both Bob and Barb's cases Hopper had to choose between those he had a chance to save and those he simply couldn't. But it didn't change the fact that they still died on his watch.

He finished the cigarette and threw it on the snow in front of his porch. For a moment was just standing in the cold, feeling numb, before he decided to finally go back to the cabin. Once he closed the door behind himself and turned away, he was met with Jane in her pajamas glaring at him in the middle of the room. For a moment he felt like she was his mother, catching him doing something reckless.

In some ways it was true.

"Cold." She said.

"Yes, but I have a jacket, see?" He pointed out with a smile.

She didn't say anything, but kept glaring at him. So he decided to change subject and got more serious.

"Why aren't you sleeping, kid?"

"Why aren't you?" This time she managed to speak a whole sentence and her expression showed clear concern over his wellbeing.

I just felt like smoking... – He wanted to say but ever since she learned about her mother and ran away to meet her, he decided to treat "Friends don't lie" rule more seriously. So he settled for:

"I couldn't sleep."

He even smiled lightly... but Jane still looked at him like something was wrong. Frankly, it wasn't the first time she had seen him awake and smoking at such a barbaric hour. After all, they've spent almost a year in one small cabin. And she wasn't stupid. She quickly realized the reason behind his insomnia.

"Nightmares?" She asked.

Hopper nodded, almost involuntarily.

She didn't ask what the nightmare was about (for which Hopper was grateful). She only smiled sympathetically and said:

"TV?"

Again, it wasn't the first time she'd seen him awake from a nightmare. And she also had nightmares of her own. So whenever one of them had a bad dream, they were spending rest of the night in front of TV. While many stations weren't broadcasting so early, Hoppers always found themselves watching some stupid show or movie until the morning has broken and chief needed to prepare for work.

Hopper looked at her and felt a little warmer inside.

"Sure, kid."

And so they've sent rest of the night on the couch, watching TV and occasionally talking about random things. It wasn't much, but somewhere along the way he stopped thinking about his latest nightmares and started to enjoy the company.

There was something very comforting about someone watching dumb TV with him, just sitting beside him. Especially because there were just too many nights when he was waking up in empty house, alone with his thoughts. El didn't need to do anything. He was making him feel better just by being there.

All in all, it wasn't a bad night.

"So this is the place?" A young voice asked.

"Hawkins, Indiana, yes." Another, this time female voice replied. And then said: "You know the plan?"

"Oh, yeah." Suddenly the youngster sounded very excited. "I can't wait to meet them. This will be so cool..."

"Focus, Herbert! This is serious!" The woman reprimanded him and then added more somberly: "He's going to attack soon. We should start to monitor the situation."

"He probably already knows we're here, Adeline." Herbert argued.

"Oh, yes." The woman named Adeline agreed. "But for now, he's gathering strength and preparing to set his plan in motion."

"Are you sure that of all the people involved, he's going to attack this guy?"

"I'm absolutely certain, Herb." She answered her friend. "After all, Jim Hopper is a perfect victim for him."

2. The rookie

The rookie

A young woman entered the Hawkins police station and immediately caught the attention of everyone inside. It wasn't because of her looks, because, frankly, not everyone could find her curly, red hair, jasper eyes or rosy cheeks attractive. It also wasn't because any of those people knew her – they had never seen her before, and Hawkins was a small town where everybody knew everybody. And certainly it wasn't because she seemed in any trouble or in need of police's assistance. No, the reason she looked so interesting to them was because she was wearing a police uniform.

Even though Powell and Callahan put their legs off of their desks, the first person to greet mysterious policewoman was Flo.

"Good morning, how can we help you?"

The woman smiled to secretary and said:

"Yes, my name is Adeline Weston and I would like to see chief Hopper."

"Did something happen? Are you from the state police?" Powell asked, curiosity on his face.

Adeline looked at him and replied:

"No, no. I'm going to work here."

Powell and Callahan exchanged weird looks. Flo, on the other hand, raised her eyebrows. A moment later a realization lightened her face.

"Oh, yes. We were told about your transfer." Then she added: "The chief is in his office right there." She pointed out the door on the end of the corridor.

"But you will probably have to wait until noon or something." Callahan commented, smirking. "Mornings are time for coffee and contemplation."

However, Flo wasn't going to let Adeline wait. She put up her phone and immediately called chief. After a short moment of persuading him, she put the phone down and turned to the new girl.

"Chief Hopper is waiting for you."

Adeline smiled to her and said:

"Thank you very much."

Once Adeline saw Jim Hopper sitting at his desk, drinking coffee from his mug and then turning his full attention on her, she couldn't resist the impression how ordinary he looked. In fact, everything about him seemed to tell her that he just wanted to be left alone and to not be bothered by people coming to him with their mundane problems. (He probably even considered her a nuisance. After all, he didn't bother to greet her.)

And yet this was the same man who uncovered government conspiracy, went into the Upside Down to save Will Byers, fought multiple times with monsters and managed to hide a girl with telekinetic powers. Truly, Jim Hopper was someone who shouldn't be underestimated. He was far smarter, far braver and far more heroic than he appeared to be at the moment.

But he noticed her watching him in silence for so long and he decided to ask with annoyance:

"What's with this staring?"

She gave him a soft smile.

"It's nothing." And then she added: "I just thought about books and their covers."

"Please, sit down, constable Weston." The chief showed her an empty seat in front of him. When she was finally settled there, he continued: "So you're our new recruit, heh?"

"I suppose so." She shrugged her arms. "I've just finished academy and was transferred here."

He gave her suspicious look. He didn't quite believe her.

"I didn't get any information about any new transfers." He said and his gaze intensified. "Moreover, I didn't *send* any requests to the Department for new recruits. And so, constable Weston," He leaned his head more towards her, not once breaking the eye contact. "I have a hard time to believe you are who you claim to be."

Adeline smiled to him once again.

Of course, she could make him believe that she really was a transfer policewoman, just like she did with Flo... however, she decided to do something different.

"You are right, sir. I am not from police. In fact, it's just a cover for my secret mission."

Hopper gave a soft sigh of resignation and lowered his head.

"Great, another person from government." He looked at the ceiling. "Just what I need after this whole shit with lab..."

"I'm not from government either." Adeline replied with another friendly smile.

For a moment Hopper seemed embarrassed (probably thinking that he foolishly uncovered government secret with her), but then he regained his composure (probably coming to the conclusion that she thought he meant the gas leak) and once again eyed her with suspicion.

"Then who are you?"

"First and foremost," Adeline began. "I'm not your enemy. To be frank, I'm here to protect you."

"Protect me?" Hopper raised his eyebrows.

"Yes." She gave him a wide grin. "You can say I'm your guardian angel."

"Guardian ang-" He started but then gave up and sighed once again.

"What does that mean exactly?"

Adeline finally stopped smiling and got serious.

"It's complicated."

"Then explain it." Hopper replied.

"I could. But you might not believe me."

The chief gave her a serious look.

"Try me."

To be fair, Adeline liked the way this conversation was going. Normally she had to be supersecretive, because, honestly, not many people would believe in what they were dealing with here. But Hopper had seen his fair share of unbelievable stuff and that meant she could say far more than usual.

She straightened herself in her seat and crossed her legs. And then she started to explain.

"Imagine a creature that gets stronger by negative emotions." She began with serious expression. "A creature that once in a while targets one specific person and their closest companions to feast itself on old resentments. A creature that knows enough about its victim to get into their head and whisper horrible things to their ear. But most importantly, a creature, which feeds itself on betrayal and so it will do everything to make friends and family turn against each other."

She could see how he was getting nervous the more he listened to her. When she finished, the atmosphere in the office got a bit more intense. For a moment Hopper was silent, probably pondering what he just heard. But he was still observing Adeline, like he was looking for some kind of clue as to whenever she was telling the truth or not.

"Sounds a bit like the devil." He finally spoke, not moving his eyes from the woman in front of him.

"You can say that." Adeline gave him a small smile. Then she changed expression into more somber. "His name is Saturninus. And he's

currently preying on you."

"So let me get this straight." Hopper leaned comfortable on his armchair and looked at her with skepticism. "There is an actual devil in Hawkins and he wants to get me."

"Mostly you. But he will probably involve the Byers family, your adoptive daughter and, of course, the rest of the Party."

There was a flicker of fear in his eyes, but it quickly disappeared, as Hopper tensed.

"As I said," Adeline said, giving him a sympathetic look. "I'm here to protect you, chief. Besides," She added with another smile. "I have a buck-up."

"Class, I would like you to welcome our new student, Herbert Weston." Mister Clarke said, leaning on the teacher's desk, while the new student took a stand in front of the class.

"Another?!" Troy almost exclaimed. "How many new losers are going to enter this school?!"

"Troy, don't be rude." Mister Clarke lectured him.

Mike, Will, Dustin, Lucas and Max were observing the new guy and thought he was odd. First of all, he had this dumb gold locks and chubby, rosy cheeks like some kind of cupid on Valentine's Day card. And then there was the matter of his big blue eyes which made him look even more like a baby angel. The rest of him, however, was as normal as could be. He was of average height (for a thirteen year old, anyway), and he was wearing jeans, flannel and a baseball cap.

When he looked at them, he gave them a wide grin, however, it quickly disappeared, and he looked embarrassed.

"Can you tell us anything about yourself, Herbert?" Mister Clarke asked.

"Oh, sure." Herbert turned to the class, cleared his throat and after moment of silence said: "I'm a level 10 spy, but I personally think that

bard is the greatest and most important class in whole D&D. If any of you disagree, fight me."

Dustin had a feeling that he will like this guy.

Hopper was observing the young woman in front of him. What he heard from her sounded ridiculous, almost as ridiculous as Murray Bauman's ramblings about aliens.

Besides, she said she wasn't from the government, yet when she was mentioning who the mysterious devil would involve, she used the word "the Party". That was how Mike, El, Will, Lucas, Dustin and Max started to call themselves, as well as Nancy, Joyce, Jonathan, Steve and Hopper. Nobody else knew about it, since it was something connected to their common "adventure". So how did Adeline Weston know about it?

However, as much as he wanted to be suspicious of her, there was something in her... some kind of soothing aura that made him think that no matter why she was there, she was trustworthy and didn't wish him any harm. Maybe it was her soft smiles. Maybe the sympathetic look she was giving him. Either way he wasn't so easy on dismissing her words.

Still, he didn't want to rely on instinct alone.

"Why should I believe you? Do you have any proof of this devil actually being here?"

Suddenly her eyes moved away from Hopper and for the first time during this whole conversation Adeline seemed to not know what to say or do. And he already knew – she had no proof. Nothing to back up her claims about the supposed devil.

But didn't Hopper encounter demons before? Wasn't he in hellish version in Hawkins, when he visited Upside Down? What happened to Will Byers if not the demonic possession by Mind Flayer?

Considering all the shit he had seen in past two years and the fact that he has a kid who can do incredible things with her mind, maybe

Hopper should throw skepticism through the window.

"Look," He gazed at Adeline and she also turned her eyes on him. "you do realize that I just can't believe your story without any kind of proof?"

She smiled *again*. He would probably find it annoying, if it wasn't for the fact that there was something sad in this smile.

"I do. In fact, I expected nothing less from you, Jim Hopper."

"Chief Hopper' for you." He corrected her. "I'm not dismissing your story. I just need a prove."

"I understand." She replied calmly. "I will hopefully find something soon."

"In the meantime," Hopper stood up from his desk and said: "Let's find you something to do."

She ended up on a traffic patrol. She was a rookie, after all.

Meanwhile, in the Hawkins Middle School, the Party decided to settle their disputes with the new guy (well, aside from Dustin, who was on the new guy's side). However, what started from the discussion over whichever character class is superior to others, quickly evolved into talk about D&D in general and soon Herbert Weston proved to be quite an interesting fella.

"Hey, tell me, have you ever did...?" He suddenly took his backpack and started to look for something inside. "Wait a minute, I'm sure I have it somewhere in there... Oh, there it is!" He exclaimed, drawing out a book.

The book had a dark cover, with picture of vampire standing on the balcony of a gloomy, gothic castle. Above the picture there was written: *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*, and under it there was a smaller title.

"*Ravenloft?*" Mike read it out loud. "Hmm... I've heard it somewhere..."

"Yeah, me too." Will added. "But it's a really old module."

"But still great." Herbert replied, hardly concealing his enthusiasm. "Maybe you would like to play with me some time?"

The Party exchanged looks with each other and then turned to him.

"Maybe one day, but not today." Lucas spoke for everybody. "Today we are going to the arcades. Wanna come?"

Herbert was going to exclaim: "Of course!", but suddenly he felt something... or rather: he felt *someone*. That someone was observing them from the distance and Herbert knew too well who it was and what he wanted.

For a moment the blond boy was thinking what he should do. He couldn't tell the Party what's going on. Not here, anyway. But somewhere else... Some more secluded part of school...

They noticed his sudden change of mood and Dustin even asked what's going on.

"Say," Herbert began. "do you know any place when we can talk in private? There is something you all need to know..."

So here's a new chapter. At first I wasn't going to reveal so much but I decided that this would be a better course of action.

Also, bonus points for everybody who will get the significance of the book Herbert shows to be Party.

Please review.

3. The Dark Powers

This time it's Herbert's time to provide exposition. Also you will finally get what event from season 1 I want to address.

Reviews would be awesome! And motivational!

The Dark Powers

Once they all were in the AV Club room, Herbert – just like earlier his boss – explained that he was here on secret mission to prevent Saturninus from succeeding. He also explained how Saturninus worked and who he was preying on. Herbert didn't say anything about his own nature or the nature of Adeline. He decided that he should serve one supernatural fact at a time, if the Party was going to believe him.

He expected them to question his story. And he was right – when he had done explaining, they seemed not quite convinced.

"Are you serious?" Max was first to speak. "Or are you just nuts?"

She wanted to sound mockingly, but there was some uneasiness in her eyes. In fact, all of them seemed to have this uneasiness.

Maybe they did believe him a bit?

"Yes, I am serious." Herbert replied and went on: "Look, I'm telling you all of this now, because I think you should know. After all," He smiled lightly. "you did manage to find a way to fight off the Mind Flayer."

Their eyes widened with surprise, and Herbert's smile grew bigger as he added:

"What is one tiny demon with manipulative tendencies for heroes like you?"

"How do you know about this?" Mike asked.

"I know what I need to know to stop Saturninus." Herbert explained

shortly. "I also know about Eleven."

They looked at him with surprise again. Mike's eyes became fierce.

"If you will hurt Eleven-" He began but Herbert didn't let him finish:

"Relax. As I said, I'm on a mission. And this mission doesn't involve hurting anyone."

A moment of silence as they were observing him carefully. Herbert could sense that they were slowly starting to believe him. Maybe they didn't trust him fully, but they at least put the possibility of his story being true into consideration.

"The book you've shown us..." Will suddenly spoke, for the first time in quite some time. All eyes turned on him and he continued: "It has something to do with Saturninus."

"Yes, it has." Herbert confirmed.

"Then Saturninus is the Dark Power." Will said. "And he can't be defeated."

"Yes, he can." Herbert replied. "In fact, once you get a grip of how he works, you can easily find a way to fight him off."

"Wait, wait, wait." Max cut in. "What the hell is Dark Power?"

"The Dark Powers are..." Lucas began explaining but was quickly lost. After a moment of thinking hard on the answer he started again: "They are, like, this forces of evil. Not exactly deities or monsters. They just... make things happen."

"But in Ravenloft Dark Powers can sometimes talk to the players." Mike added. "The whole concept of this campaign is to put heroes through torment so they either prevail or get corrupted and fall into darkness." He looked at Herbert. "From what you've told us about Saturninus he wants to torment Hopper and make us betray him. Why Hopper, of all people?"

Herbert chuckled to his thoughts. Then he gazed at the boy.

"Isn't it obvious?" Then he got serious. "After all, he did let you hit him..."

Herbert was going to elaborate but the bell started to ring. And since they were so far away from their classroom, they had to run like crazy to get there.

Obviously it was hard to focus on class after what they've heard. While the teacher was telling them about history of Rome, Mike, Will, Dustin, Lucas and Max kept thinking about the mysterious Saturninus and whenever Herbert was telling the truth.

From time to time one of the Party members was looking in Herbert's direction. True, not only this guy showed up out of nowhere and told them bunch of unbelievable things, but he also seemed to know about the events of last two years. The kids wondered who he might be – friend of foe? He sure wanted them to think he's the former.

Mike was worried because Herbert mentioned El. The question was: How much he knew? And were his intentions good? If so; if his so-called mission wasn't a lie, then what that meant for Eleven? Especially considering the fact that El was now Jane Hopper – chief's adoptive daughter. Was she in danger too?

Then again – Mike didn't forget that Hopper was hiding El for a year and forbade her to contact with boys. And even though some tiny part of Mike was telling him: "Chief wanted to protect her... And he's now letting you come in, as long as you're careful...", the boy was now seeing him differently.

Isn't it obvious? After all, he did let you hit him... – Herbert's voice came back to Mike. He still wasn't quite sure what Herb meant by it. Nevertheless, if this whole story with Saturninus was true, then, of course, Mike will try to help him. Hopper was, after all, part of the Party. And Party always have their backs.

Will, on the other hand, kept thinking about the Dark Powers. He was the one affected the most by both Upside Down and Mind Flayer. So, obviously, the prospect of *another* monster coming to Hawkins made him nervous. But – according to Herbert – this time the monster

wasn't preying on Will or didn't want to take over their world. No, Saturninus was a different kind of monster – he was tormenting and corrupting. A true Dark Power.

Will liked Hopper. The chief helped get him out of Upside Down and – according to Will's mom – he even performed first aid when the boy wasn't breathing. Then, when it was all over, Hopper was accompanying him and his mom during visits with doctor Owens. He was also assisting with getting through Mind Flayer's possession and communicating with Will. The chief was a friend and there was something very comforting in having him on their side.

So Will was twice as scared – first of the Dark Power that they were going to soon encounter, and then – that this power was after his friend.

Lucas was a tad suspicious of Herbert. He seemed to know too much about them. He claimed to not be from government, and really, Lucas wasn't suspecting that government recruits at such a young age... but Lucas had hard time believe that Herbert was saying the truth.

Especially because they were talking about chief Hopper. Hopper was able to take care of himself. Many times he proved to be the one who knew what to do at the moment. Lucas only once heard that Hopper needed to be rescued – when he was trapped underneath Hawkins and Will, Mike, Mrs. Byers and Bob had to find him quickly.

Dustin also thought that Hopper was a badass... but the boy did put into consideration that Dark Powers were speaking into people's psyche. And how much did the Party know about chief?

Dustin was also far from dismissing Herbert's story. After all, he did remember they were friends with a psychic, not so long time ago they fought Demogorgon, Mind Flayer and demodogs, one of said demodogs being Dustin's pet and all... If there were creatures like that, maybe there was also a creature like Saturninus.

Max didn't know Hopper all that well, but from what she observed he was level-headed and in control... but also open enough to listened to boys if they had some idea of what was going on. She kind of liked him. He was nice... for a cop.

And as much as some of Herbert's words seemed to sound insane, there was part of her that was like: "Well, this is my life now... Ever since I started to hang out with this bunch of losers..."

They've spent the next break debating over whenever they should believe Herbert or not. Will, Dustin and Max argued that they should, because of their previous experiences; while Lucas and Mike thought they should keep an eye on Herbert because there was something fishy about him. Finally, they settled for not entirely dismissing his story... but not trusting him fully, either.

When the classes ended, the Party found Herbert going his way towards the exit. He didn't even look at them as they approached him.

"Listen, Herb," Mike began. "let's say that we believe you. What should we do now to stop this Saturninus?"

Herbert turned to them and grinned widely.

"For now," He went on. "each of you will have to find the answer for a certain question. It is very important, so you better focus."

They all started to listen carefully. Herbert made a meaningful pause and kept them uncertain for a moment. Then he finally spoke:

"Why did Lando Calrissian betray Han Solo?"

"What?!" Dustin asked. "What Lando has to do with any of this?"

"You will see." Herbert said, suddenly becoming serious. "This is important question. Just... think it through until we meet again, okay?"

They gave him a weird look. But he didn't seem to mind. He only grinned again and started to walk away.

"Bye, guys!" He said, waving to them. "See you soon!"

He was walking towards a red-haired policewoman waiting for him on the school parking. Soon they've met, exchanged couple of sentences in hushed voices and then the woman turned her eyes at

the Party. And they knew, almost instantly: she was also the part of the operation. But she didn't bring to mind the cold-blooded female agent that was accompanying doctor Brenner; the one that – according to Eleven – killed Benny and then staged his suicide. No, this woman was almost radiating with warmth.

For a moment she was observing them with soft eyes, so they started to walk towards their bikes (and Max's skateboard) to not give an impression that they were staring. When both strangers entered their car, the Party decided they weren't in the mood for arcades. And so they took a different turn.

This whole story with the devil didn't leave him alone, as much as Hopper wanted to focus on boring normalcy of Hawkins. All day long he was thinking about whenever he should tell anybody about what he heard today. Part of him thought that he shouldn't – after all, from the outside perspective it sounded like a rambling of a mad person. Then again, if there was some truth in Adeline's words, maybe he should at least tell about it Joyce. Maybe even he should say it like he didn't really believe it.

Or maybe he should talk with the Party. After all, those kids always seemed to know what the hell was going on with all those monsters...

Either way, he soon found himself inside Byers household, smoking with Joyce Byers and telling her about a weird thing that happened to him on a station. Joyce listened to him, sometimes asking questions about this mysterious new police officer. And he was replying as well as he could.

"Do you think it might be true?" Joyce asked, when he was done with his story. She inhaled the smoke in her cigarette.

"We've seen a lot of weird shit in this town, haven't we?" He gave her sad smile, and then got serious. "But this seems to be... I don't know..." He looked her in the eyes and asked: "And what do you think?"

Joyce looked at the space before her and a gray smoke left her lips.

For a moment she wasn't looking at him, like she was in deep thought. Then she turned back at him and finally said:

"Let's wait and keep an eye on everything weird. If nothing happens, that girl is lying, if something does happen, we should put into consideration that she might be onto something."

"That's what I thought too." He smiled weakly.

"But I also think you should tell Jane at some point. Maybe she can find a way to determine if this Adeline is telling the truth."

"Maybe you're right." He replied, but he seemed absent for a couple of seconds.

They were sitting in silence for a moment and then Hopper stood up.

"Speaking of Jane, I should probably go back to her." He looked at his hostess and said, with another weak smile: "See you soon, Joyce."

She smiled back.

"Take care, Hopper."

But when he arrived at the cabin, he found four almost-too-well-known bikes parked near it, alongside with a skateboard leaning on the wall next to the front door (No, he didn't suspect that Max went all the way through on it; more like Lucas picked her up on his bike). The chief gave a sign of resignation. He was going to lecture them about the importance of conspiracy *yet again*.

Hopper performed his special knock and after a short moment of silence, he heard the locks being unlocked. When he entered the cabin, he saw Jane sitting between Mike and Will, while Dustin took the armchair and Lucas and Max settled for the chairs at table. Chief crossed his arms and looked at them with stern expression but they didn't seem to be concerned about it.

"I take it that your bikes just decided to lay down right in the open." He said and then added: "Also I didn't remember any of you announcing your arrival in advance, just like we established."

"It's an emergency." Jane explained.

"Emergency, eh?" Hopper put his arms down. "What kind of emergency?"

He already had a sneaking suspicion about it. It wouldn't be the first time these kids knew something so soon.

"Someone told us, you're targeted." Dustin replied.

"And it's highly possible that targeted by a Dark Power." Will added.

Dark Power... Of course. Just his fucking luck...

Hopper gave a soft sigh.

"I know." He took his hat off and put it on the rack. Then he also took off his jacket. "There was this new officer, Adeline Weston," He hanged the jacket and went further into his living room. "who told me that, apparently, a devil is after me."

"Devil?" Lucas raised his eyebrows.

"She didn't call him that," Hopper cleared out, standing at the kitchen counter. "but the way she was describing this guy, he sounded like devil. And how do you know about this?" He changed the subject.

They told him about the new boy in school. A mysterious Herbert Weston, who at first seemed to be a harmless nerd, but then, in the privacy of AV Club, told them about the danger threatening chief Hopper. Herbert also seemed to know about Jane and about Upside Down. He informed them that Saturninus wasn't the devil, but more like something called Dark Power.

So this is what she meant by "buck-up" – Hopper thought. – A teenage kid. He probably isn't even her kid.

"What do you think, chief?" Mike asked, taking Hopper out of his thoughts. "What should we do now?"

They all looked at him, waiting for his answer. And he was going to give the same answer he gave Joyce, but before he spoke, Dustin

grinned and said:

"Don't worry, chief, we're going to protect you."

Hopper raised his eyebrows.

"You. *You* are going to protect *me*?" He questioned him.

"Apparently Herbert thinks we can face this guy." Max said.

"First of all," Hopper began. "we don't even know if this guy even exist. Both Adeline and Herbert could make him up."

However, he knew that they knew he didn't believe it entirely.

"But let's say they're saying the truth." Mike started, giving Hopper a stern look. "What then?"

Hopper was silent. The fact that they were all staring at him didn't help him focus.

"I don't know." He finally said. "I didn't have time to create any plan. But I do know this," He leaned on the counter and his eyes moved from one face to another as he went on: "if Saturninus is real, stay away from this."

"What about you, chief?" Will asked, clearly worried.

Yes, what about Hopper himself? How *he* was going to fight the devil, Dark Power or whatever the hell this Saturninus was?

But he will probably involve the Byers family, your adoptive daughter and, of course, the rest of the Party... – Adeline's voice echoed in his memory. If this was true... if there really was devil after him... Then he should keep him away from anybody else. He didn't know what his plan against Saturninus was going to be, but he was certain of one thing – he didn't want to endanger anyone in town, especially these kids.

"I will find a way." The policeman finally replied, his voice stern. "I can defend myself."

But they didn't seem to be convinced. Especially Jane. She was looking at him with visible concern. Nevertheless, the Party was in the cabin for the next hour and they all ended up watching something in TV.

And then Hopper called to Joyce to both inform her about her youngest son's whereabouts and give Hopper excuse to rid off those annoying kids. Joyce was happy to obliged and soon Will was informed that his mother wanted him home, because Jonathan and Nancy were preparing Movie Night. The Party said goodbye to Hoppers and went their ways.

When Will came back home, everything was ready for the Movie Night. Mom and Nancy made popcorn, while Jonathan prepared the video tape titled *Ghostbusters*. Will was sitting between his mom and Jonathan (who was sitting next to his girlfriend).

But when the video started to play, instead of the beginning of *Ghostbusters*, they saw something entirely different. After an initial blackness, the camera recording started to play and – to their great surprise – they saw a man eerie similar to Jim Hopper sitting in one room with doctor Brenner. The room was dark and the bad quality of recording made it hard to distinguish any details. However, chief was holding cigarette and he slowly lightened it up.

"*Where is the girl?*" Brenner asked, turning to the policeman.

Hopper took a puff from cigarette and lazily released smoke from his mouth.

"*You're gotta give me a word...*" He finally said.

The view became grainy and suddenly, for a couple of seconds there was just snowy screen. Then it returned, just as sudden as it was previously gone. Just in time to catch Hopper say another sentence, before everything became black:

"*Then I'll tell you. Tell you where your little science experiment is...*"

4. The tape, Part 1

The tape, Part 1

The silence fell in the living room, as Mrs. Byers, her sons and Nancy were staring at, now blank, TV in collective shock. For a couple of seconds all four of them couldn't believe what they just saw. The idea that chief Hopper would sell out Eleven – a girl he grew to deeply care for – to doctor Brenner, seemed ridiculous at best and downright outrageous at worst.

And when after these couple of seconds of initial shock passed, Joyce, Will, Jonathan and Nancy realized when and where the video took place and started to think about what they've actually seen.

Joyce remembered when she and Hopper were captured by the lab people and after a really long time of being handcuffed to the chair, they released her. As she, Hopper and two guards were walking to some place, she said in hushed voice to chief:

"I don't understand."

"We came to an agreement."

It struck her back then that Hopper didn't even look at her. He just walked beside her, eyes on the corridor in front of them.

"What?"

"Look, everything that's happened here and everything that's gonna happen, we don't talk about. You want Will back? This place has nothing to do with it. That's the deal. You got it?"

And then they were given the equipment to wander into the Upside Down and save Will.

She knew that the deal was one of those not quite ethical. But given what horrible things Hawkins Lab was doing, keeping their mouth shut seemed like an enough morally ambiguous thing to do. But even back then it wasn't feeling like something Brenner would agree on. After all, he could very well finish them off right on the spot.

However, she was pushing this thought aside, because, at the time, there was far more pressing matter to focus on.

Right now this memory started to make sense. Hopper exchanged one child for another. Because of that bargain she got her son back... but at the same time a sweet, little girl had to face her abusers. And this encounter ended with her being gone for some time.

Will also remembered something. He remembered waking up in the Upside Down with chief and mom leaning over him after successful reanimation. Soon Will made the same connection as Joyce – that Hopper traded information about El's whereabouts for the possibility of rescuing him.

They just... make things happen...

Will was more than certain that this tape showing up right here, right now wasn't a coincidence. That someone left this tape here so they would see it. And the boy was more than certain that he knew who it was.

Jonathan was confused as to what the hell was going on. This must have been a mistake. Just like the body of Will taken out of the lake, this man on the recording was fake. Or, in other words – the man on the video wasn't chief Jim Hopper but merely someone looking like him. After all, the recording was of a very poor quality...

Meanwhile Nancy thought that there was definitely something off about this video (well, aside from the fact that it wasn't a *Ghostbusters* movie...). She voiced her opinion:

"Someone tampered with this recording."

They all looked at her, so she stood up, put the tape on the rewind and turned it on one again. They've watched as Brenner asks about Eleven, Hopper takes a puff from cigarette and says: *You're gotta give me a word...* And then... snowy screen once again. But before they would hear the infamous words, Nancy stopped the video and looked back at them.

"Isn't it convenient that there is a static in this particular moment?"

Just when chief is going to say what Brenner has to promise him?"

"Yeah, it is." Jonathan replied. "In fact, how this tape ended up here? I've rented it from the same place as always."

"Have you told anyone you're going to rent *Ghostbusters* for Movie Night?" His mother asked.

"No. I didn't even tell Nancy. It was supposed to be a surprise." Jonathan replied.

"But someone knew about your plans." Will suddenly spoke and looked at his brother. "Someone replaced the movie with this video, because they wanted us to see it."

"This is more than certain." Joyce added.

"But who? The guys from the Lab?" Nancy inquired.

"No." Will spoke once again. "The Dark Powers."

They looked at him, Jonathan and Nancy with raised eyebrows, Joyce – with understanding. And so the teenagers had been privy on the current situation. And even thought Nancy and Jonathan weren't quite sure about this story or if the Party should trust two strangers, the sudden appearance of the record made a little bit more sense.

"So what should we do now?" Jonathan asked.

"I think we shouldn't show it to anybody from the group." Nancy replied. "At least, not until we find out what really happened and how this record got here." Then her expression changed into more somber. "If Mike saw this... he would certainly turn against chief."

"Is it really chief?" Jonathan questioned. "He kinda looks like him, but the quality of the video is bad."

Joyce wondered if she should tell them. If she should make it clear that she knew the whole story and this story was painting Hopper in not very good light. How would the knowledge of Will being alive thanks to this betrayal affect their loyalty towards the man?

"I will talk to Hopper tomorrow." She finally said. "Maybe he will tell me something."

Especially that she had questions of her own.

Meanwhile Mike Wheeler was riding his bike through the Mirkwood, when suddenly he heard it...

"Welcome, hero."

It was a whisper, but it sounded...it *felt* like someone just said it to his ear. It wasn't very pleasant, especially because the voice of that someone was cold, slithering and hissing. The boy felt uneasiness building up inside him.

Mike instantly stopped his bike and looked around. It seemed like there was nobody around him, however, he could somehow feel someone's presence near him.

"How horrible it must be for a righteous hero such as yourself." The voice hissed to his ear again. "To let someone like that walk around unpunished."

Mike felt how the uneasiness grows into cold sensation of fear.

"Who... who are you?!" He said with cracking voice.

"No one in particular. Just a friend." The voice reassured.

"Then show yourself!" Mike managed to muster some courage.

"When time is right, noble knight." He heard the answer and then the voice continued: "If only she knew, who he was... if only she knew what he has done... She wouldn't want to stay in his house any longer."

"Who are you talking about?" Mike asked in demanding tone.

"Why, about poor Eleven and this treacherous bastard, of course."

Something in Mike's mind clicked.

"You're Saturninus." He said and shook his head, before he added: "I'm not listening to you."

"You will see the reason." Saturninus replied. "After all, paladins do have an ability to see evil."

And just like that the presence was gone.

For a short moment Mike was just standing there, still processing what just happened. And then he clenched his fists around the bike's handle and started to pedal like crazy. There was no time to lose. He had to get to his house.

Once he got to his bedroom and turned the walkie-talkie on, he said, frantically:

"Guys, guys! Saturninus is real!"

"Then I'll tell you. Tell you where your little science experiment is..."

Sitting in the Byers' living room, Hopper watched as the recording of his conversation with Brenner goes black. He felt hot flush in his chest. Then he felt an all too familiar emotion...

It's incredible how past sins can come back.

Not that he ever forgot what he has done...

Of course, it didn't escape his attention that this record was cleverly edited to not show certain things. Hopper imagined the Party seeing it and turning to him, either demanding explanation, or throwing accusations at him. He imagined Jane's anger after learning that she was living in one cabin with a man who betrayed her. He imagined Mike yelling at him, maybe even going violent just like that time, when Jane came back. He also imagined himself explaining his actions to them and realizing how futile it would be. Because what he has done back then was unforgivable, even though he tried to make up for it...

You really are a black hole, Jim.

"Hop?" Joyce's voice brought him back to reality.

Oh, yes, Joyce...

Hopper was hesitant to look at her. What will she think of him now? She was suspicious even back then, when they were going to save Will. She knew that Hopper made a bargain with Brenner. Maybe she even knew what it was really about, and now when her suspicions had been confirmed, she was going to despise him.

However, when Hopper finally turned to her, he saw not contempt but concern.

"Hopper," She started again. "I don't know how this video got here, but I do know this: someone put it there on purpose. Not to mention that some time ago Mike contacted Will and told him, he actually met Saturninus."

Chief felt even more nervous. Mike Wheeler... Of all people...

"And...?" He asked, trying to get a grip of himself.

"Mike is okay, but he said, he will tell you everything after school. But, Hopper," She leaned closer to him. "you have a proof. It's time to make a plan."

Hopper looked once again at the TV. Normally he would already find the best course of action, but the image of himself in that cell, making the bargain was still fresh in his mind.

His name is Saturninus. And he's currently preying on you...

He really was. And it was pretty clever of him to drop this record and then talk with Mike.

"I don't think they will going to help me..." Hopper finally said. "Not after they see *this*." He pointed at the screen.

"Then we won't show it to them." Joyce smiled to him. "I've already told Will, Jonathan and Nancy to not say anything to others..."

He shot her a weird look and she quickly stopped talking. Then he

went back to stare at the space before him.

"You are right about not showing them the tape. But they will find out about... *this*... one way or another."

And then he will get what he deserved...

Hopper clenched his fists on the rims of his hat, settled on his lap.

"Hop... Hop, listen to me." Joyce looked into his eyes, resting her hands on his shoulders. "You didn't leave me, when I was looking for Will, so I'm not going to leave you when a Dark Power is after you. Try to remember this."

Hopper relaxed.

"What about Adeline and Herbert?" Joyce inquired. "They're supposed to protect you. We should at least tell them about the tape."

He didn't say anything. He was thinking.

Yes, he needed to talk with Adeline. Try to find out why – if she knew so much – she didn't warn them about the tape or prevented Mike from meeting Saturninus.

"Thank you, Joyce." He finally said, put the hat on and stood up. "Can I take the recording? You know, to examine it."

"Of course." She replied.

Then she ejected the tape from the TV, put it in the *Ghostbusters* case and handed it over to chief, who smiled to her. Now he knew what he was going to do today. It was going to be another one of those odd cases that seemed to get common in Hawkins.

While riding to school, Mike was thinking about the encounter from the previous night. He could still feel chills, remembering the hissing voice in his ear, but, most importantly, he was pondering Saturninus' words. He knew that they were supposed to make him question chief Hopper; see him in different light.

If only she knew, who he was... if only she knew what he has done...

This definitely intrigued Mike. What did he mean by this? Obviously not the fact that Hopper kept Eleven in the house and forbade her from contacting boys. Because that was something Mike and El knew very well. So it had to be something else. Something Hopper supposedly did and it affected El. On the other hand, Saturninus could say these things just to mess with Mike's head.

"Hello, Mike! How are you?!" Some female voice took him out of his thoughts.

He immediately stopped and looked at his left side, where a familiar red-headed policewoman was leaning on the police car and giving the boy warm smile. Any other strange adult who would call to him in the middle of the street, would garner instant suspicion from him, but when Mike observed this woman, there seemed to be no malice in her.

"You must be constable Adeline Weston." Mike said.

"Yes, I am." Her smile got even wider.

But then she quickly got serious and walked to him.

"I heard, you've seen him."

She didn't even have to specify who she meant.

"Yes." Mike replied shortly. "But I've tried not to listen to him."

For a moment Adeline wasn't saying anything. She just observed the boy in front of her. And then, suddenly she spoke:

"You are the Party's paladin, right?"

"Yes." He said once again.

"And you always try to do what's right?"

"Yes."

Mike felt uneasy. Partly because last night Saturninus tried to speak to his sense of justice; and partly because he sometimes was leaving the righteous path to do not-so-good things.

"Do you know the motto of the Department of Police?" Adeline asked all of a sudden.

"To serve and protect." Mike said without even thinking.

"That's right!" Adeline smiled again.

He knew she had some purpose in asking him all those questions. She probably wanted to tell him something, so he won't fall for Saturninus' words so easily.

"Look," Mike began, feeling the pressure of time. "I need to go to school right now."

"Of course," Adeline replied, still smiling. "but one last thing." Her expression became somber as she said: "A lot can happen in a year. Remember that."

She came back to her car and he started to pedal faster to the school.

This whole story with tape made Will nervous at school. The fact that he was rescued at the price of Eleven, just didn't sit right with him. Will was torn between keeping his mouth shut (for both his own and chief's sake) and telling his friends about what he had learned (because that seemed like a right thing to do).

"You should tell them." Herbert whispered to him after the first class.

Will glared at him.

"No." He said firmly, also whispering. "Are you nuts? If they find out, they will hate chief."

"Knowing Saturninus, they will find out sooner or later." The blonde argued. "Better tell them the whole story, before they will learn the edited one. Don't you think?"

Will didn't reply, but, apparently, Herbert wasn't expecting any answer, because he left him alone. Nevertheless, Will had to admit the new guy was right to some extent.

So here we are. At first I wanted to end this chapter on another cliffhanger, but I just couldn't think of the best way to do it.

You also get the first glimpse of Saturninus. Tell me how do you like him in the comments.

5. The tape, Part 2

Okay, in this chapter I wanted to include some Eleven, since she didn't have much to do so far. Also I was planning to end on different cliffhanger, but I realized it couldn't be done by now (at least not in a way I wanted it to be done). So I will leave it for next chapter, maybe?

Please, review. I was disappointed there was hardly any reviews under the last chapter.

The tape, Part 2

Since there was someone after her adoptive father and since she couldn't go out, Jane was going to at least watch him from the distance; check if he's okay. And so some time after Hopper left for work, the girl blindfolded herself, held tightly to one of chief's flannels and focused on finding him.

Soon Jane was surrounded by the familiar darkness. It took her a moment to notice Hopper sitting on the lonely coach in the distance. He was staring at something with a gloomy expression. For a next couple of seconds he was silent... and then Mrs. Byers appeared next to him, out of nowhere. Her expression was the one of worry, as she was observing chief.

Jane wondered what Hopper was staring at. It was clearly disturbing him in some way. The girl was scared but approached the two adults on the coach.

"I don't think they will going to help me..." Hopper broke the silence and pointed at the space in front of him. "Not after they see *this*."

Jane stopped in front of him.

What *this* was? And why Hopper thought they won't help him? Jane was going to protect him with everything she got. Just like she was going to protect everybody else...

"Then we won't show it to them." Was Joyce's reply to his words. "I've

already told Will, Jonathan and Nancy to not say anything to others..." She immediately stopped talking, when Hopper looked at her.

Meanwhile Jane wondered even more what they were talking about. What was the thing they wanted to hide from everybody?

Hopper went back to observing whatever was in front of him.

"You are right about not showing them the tape. But they will find out about... *this*... one way or another."

What *this* was? – She asked herself again. And what was the tape they were talking about and why they wanted to hide it so badly?

Chief tightened his grip on the hat positioned on his lap. Jane noticed this gesture. He must have been very stressed. The girl thought that whatever was happening right now, Sautrnius probably made it happen. After all, he did meet with Mike last night...

And the thought of Mike made Jane focus her attention from chief to her friend. She saw him sitting on a bike, but not moving. Soon a strange woman appeared next to him. She had red hair and was wearing the same uniform as Callahan and Powell. Jane instantly got the impression that the mysterious stranger was here to help – just like Mrs. Byers.

Oh yeah, Hopper did say there was a new police officer and that police officer warned him about Saturninus. This could be her.

"You are the Party's paladin, right?" She asked all of a sudden.

"Yes." Mike replied.

"And you always try to do what's right?"

"Yes." He said again. There was some kind of uneasiness on his face, like he was embarrassed for some reason.

"Do you know the motto of the Department of Police?" The police officer asked Mike *another* question and, just like earlier, he responded almost immediately:

"To serve and protect."

The woman grinned widely and Jane thought that she had a nice smile; the kind of smile that was radiating with positivity and making the day a bit less gloomy.

Meanwhile Mike was silent for a moment and Jane could see he clearly wanted to just go. Soon he looked at the policewoman and said:

"Look, I need to go to school right now."

"Of course, but one last thing." Suddenly the woman got serious, as she added: "A lot can happen in a year. Remember that."

Mike started to pedal his bike again, leaving his interlocutor alone. The woman on the other hand, turned back and suddenly she and Jane were looking at each other.

There was no denying here: the new police officer knew perfectly well that Jane was observing her right now. And it was the first time since quite some time when this happened to Jane. Understandably the teenager was astonished by this turn of events.

There was only two of them in the blackness. For a couple of seconds the red-haired woman wasn't saying anything, she just smiled friendly at the astounded girl, who felt oddly calm. Unlike the monsters in the Upside Down, the woman in front of her didn't have any bad intentions.

"Hello." She said finally. "My name is Adeline. I'm here to protect your dad."

"How... how can you...?" Astounded Jane started from the first question on her mind, but she was still shocked and couldn't find the best words.

But Adeline understood immediately, because she smiled once again and replied:

"How can I see you? Well, let's just say that I have a powers of my own."

"Powers?" Jane was intrigued. "You're from laboratory too?"

This time Adeline's smile became sadder. She gave Jane a sympathetic look.

"No, not exactly. It's... complicated."

They went silent once again. Jane wondered what else she could ask the mysterious woman. Adeline, on the other hand, stopped smiling completely and came closer to the girl. With serious expression and arms crossed, she finally spoke:

"You know, in spite of his many flaws, chief Hopper is a good man."

"I know" Jane said. Adeline raised her chin and asked, all of a sudden:

"What's your word of the day today?"

Jane tried to remember, but quickly realized Hopper didn't give her any word of the day yet. Adeline saw it somehow in girl's face, because she said:

"Try 'atonement'. A-T-O-N-E-M-E-N-T. Would you do this for me?" She gave Jane another friendly smile.

Jane couldn't help but nod. *Atonement*, she noted in her mind to check it later.

"Remember what you've heard here. It's very important that you remember all of this in near future." Adeline told her in the end.

And that was the moment when the connection was lost and Jane found herself once again in the cabin. At first she was just sitting in the same place, blindfold still on. She was processing what just happened and what she just heard. There was a lot to think about for rest of the day.

Then she took the blindfold off and directed towards the dictionary.

During the break the Party and Herbert met once again in the AV

Club. They were to discuss Mike's encounter with Saturninus. Since last night they had time to think about the event, and now they could look at it more rationally.

"So let's resume." Lucas began. "Saturninus told you that if Eleven knew something about Hopper, she wouldn't want to live in the same house as him. Did he say anything else?" He looked at Mike.

"Only that I will see the reason, because I'm a paladin." Mike explained. "Generally he was calling me 'a righteous hero', 'noble knight' and things like that. He was clearly trying to speak to my sense of justice."

"Yeah." Herbert said. "But remember, the Dark Powers always try to corrupt lawful good characters. And they often use lawful good alignment against them."

"And you have a thing for Eleven, so turning you against chief is easy." Max commented.

This statement seemed to make Mike uncomfortable.

Meanwhile Will, who was sitting silent whole this time, felt the flush of heat in his chest. He wanted to follow the general agreement that his friends shouldn't know about the tape; he didn't want to dig chief Hopper deeper. But at the same time, the knowledge of Hopper's betrayal made the boy more nervous with every moment spent in school, around Mike, Lucas, Max and Dustin.

And Herbert kept giving him this meaningful look like he wanted to say: "You know, you should totally tell them." Frankly he was discreet and others didn't notice it so far.

"So what do you think?" Dustin asked and his question seemed to be directed to all people present in the room. "What Saturninus actually mean? What chief did that seems to be so horrible?"

"Do you know what it is?" Lucas turned to Herbert and his tone indicated that he was actually certain the blonde boy knows.

Herbert only smiled to his thoughts, before he got serious and looked at them.

"What I may or may not know, is not my secret to tell." He gave Will another one of those quick glances, prompting him to speak.

Will had a feeling this statement will only make them more curious.

"So we should ask chief?" Dustin assumed, raising his eyebrows.

"If you think he will tell you..." Herbert said, shrugging.

Once again Will felt like he should tell them. After all, his version of the story was at least giving some kind of justification for Hopper's actions... But even he didn't have a whole story. Will wasn't in that room when chief was making the deal with Brenner. Will didn't know how it went, what Brenner was offering exactly, what else was said and done. The whole story could be provided only by chief Hopper himself.

"I'm going to tell him about what happened yesterday." Mike said suddenly. "Maybe I will find out something. Then again, chief's good in hiding facts." He added with a bit of bitterness.

"Constable Weston, what a pleasant surprise." Hopper said sarcastically when Adeline entered his office.

"I've heard, you wanted to see me, chief." She, on the other hand, seemed as friendly as usual. She took a seat and looked at him with smile. "How can I help you?"

Hopper knew it will be hard. In fact, he made multiple versions of how he will start this conversation in his mind. But right now, being in presence of this woman again, for a moment he found himself speechless. He never talked about what happened in that room. Even when Joyce showed him the tape, they didn't tackle that subject. And now he was going to do it with a total stranger.

He straightened himself and put the hands on the desk.

"Do you know that Byers family and Nancy saw some... sensitive material?" He whispered, his eyes on the woman.

Adeline saddened and replied, also whispering:

"Yes. I also know about Mike."

"Oh, really?" Hopper raised his eyebrows. "You knew it *before* or *after* it happened?"

"I'm following Sautrninus for a really long time, chief." She said. "I knew he will make a move sooner or later. I and Herbert had couple hypotheses as to what kind of move it will be exactly, but we were both certain it will involve revelation about your deal with doctor Brenner, and so we took certain measures."

"What measures?" He asked.

She gave him a small, almost sad smile.

"The kind of measures that would help the Party see through Saturninus' manipulations. Not enough to reveal what you did in that room, but enough to counter Saturninus' seeds of doubt."

Hopper wasn't as optimistic as her. He leaned closer to Adeline and lowered his voice.

"Do you know what would happen if the Party found out about what I did? If they knew I betrayed one of them? They would change their minds about me right from the spot."

She gave him a sympathetic look.

"Mrs. Byers found out yesterday. Did she abandon you?"

Hopper remembered the concerned look on Joyce's face and her reassurance that she won't leave him... But then he shook his head.

"That's different. Her son was on the line."

"But Will is not only Joyce Byers' son." Adeline replied, giving him a sympathetic look. "He's also Jonathan's younger brother and Mike, Lucas and Dustin's friend."

"What about Jane?" Chief asked, looking into Adeline's eyes.

It was Jane's reaction to the tape that he feared the most. After all, it

was her that he exchanged for Will back then. Ever since he saw this damn recording, he imagined explaining himself to her. He knew she would be heartbroken and angry, even more so than that fateful day when she broke the 'Don't Be Stupid' rules. Because this time she would definitely hate him and no justification in the world could make her trusting him again.

Adeline stopped smiling, but was still looking at Hopper sympathetically.

"That's the hard part. And really, it would be better if she knew the full story."

"Wait." Hopper raised his eyebrows. "are you suggesting that I should actually *tell* her?"

"Better she hears it from you than anyone else." Adeline replied. "And you would take weapon away from Saturninus. Just... put it into consideration, okay, chief?"

Hopper was silent for a moment. On one hand, he found the solution ridiculous, but at the same time, some part of his mind actually thought there was some sense in it. After all, friends don't lie...

"Well, when we at it," Adeline began, getting Hopper's attention back on herself. "Saturninus will probably attack you personally soon. Therefore I propose certain precaution to prevent it."

"Oh, yeah?" Hopper leaned his back comfortably on the armchair. "What kind of precaution?"

Suddenly Adeline's expression got more serious than he ever seen her so far. She leaned towards him and looked into his eyes.

"No matter what, don't be alone. Always surround yourself with people who care about you. Jane, Mrs. Byers, Flo, whoever. Just keep yourself in a company that wish you well. Because once you will be left on your own, you will be an easy target for Saturninus. I will be near the station so he won't dare to come here... but once you leave this place, you will be open for his attack."

"You do know, I can defend myself, right?" Was Hopper's response.

"I've fought my fair share of demons in my life."

"But it's different with Sautrninus." Adeline argued. "He can't be shot, beaten up or hurt in any physical way. Human weapons are useless against him. However," She smiled. "there is a way for mortals to defend themselves from him. And that's being surrounded by your close ones."

"Didn't you say that he's turning friends and family against each other?" Chief asked.

"Yes, but here's the thing: he likes to first plant seeds of doubt. Actual open attack, in which he turns friends and family against his victim, comes much, *much* later, when he has more power over them. Besides," she added. "Saturninus has a weakness and at this stage of his plan he won't risk being open to it."

"Care to share what that weakness is?" Hopper asked wryly.

"Isn't it obvious?" She smiled mysteriously.

Chief wanted to say something, but he actually started to think about what Adeline just said. Certain thought came to his mind and at first he was going to dismiss it as ridiculous... but then he started to ponder it deeper. Yes, actually it kind of made sense...

Before he knew it, Adeline was gone from his office.

They both decided that it would be better for Mike to meet with Hopper in his cabin, instead of his office. In the meantime, the boy had time to think about in school. He was thinking about Sautrninus' words and Herbert's question on Lando Calrissian. And then he remembered when he, El, Lucas and Dustin were hiding from Brenner and his men, and when Hopper contacted them through walkie-talkie... Dustin said that chief, Nancy and Mrs. Byers could betray them, just like Lando Calrissian...

Why did Lando Calrissian betray Han Solo?

If only she knew, who he was... if only she knew what he has done...

Brenner came to school to get Eleven. The Party wondered back then, how it was possible that he knew they were there? Could it be...? No... As much as Mike didn't like chief, he had hard time believe the guy would be capable of... Because why?

Nevertheless, Mike kept thinking about it and even shared his thoughts with Dustin, Lucas, Max and Will. He could see their thought process was just like his – on the one hand they were dismissing the possibility as ridiculous, but on the other hand they seemed to take it into consideration. Well, Dustin and Lucas were, for sure, because Max thought it was stupid, and Will seemed to be tense for some reason.

So there they were, once again in the AV Club room, talking about whenever Hopper could or could not betray Eleven, when suddenly Dustin notice something.

"Hey, was this here before?" He asked, pointing at the tape lying on the table.

The tape was out of the box and looked new. The only thing indicating that it wasn't blank, was the piece of paper glued to it by a screw tape; and the sign written on said piece of paper: "To the Party".

"It definitely wasn't here when we were here last time." Max replied to Dustin's question.

"Don't you think this is kind of creepy?" Lucas added.

"Do you think we should see it?" Mike asked, putting the tape of the table to look at it closer.

"No!"

Will's scream took them by surprise. To this very moment he wasn't saying much. All four of them instantly turned their eyes on him. He looked scared, when he explained in quiet, shaking voice:

"We shouldn't see it."

"Why?" Lucas asked.

"You know something, Will." Mike concluded. "Do you know what's on this tape?"

The boy was silent for a moment. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath. When he glanced at his friends again, his eyes had some kind of shaky determination.

"Just trust me: don't watch this tape. Better destroy it before anybody will see it."

"Why?" Lucas asked again. "If you know something, tell us. We have demon on our back."

"And this is something this demon want us to see." Will replied. "So we turn against chief Hopper."

It took Mike a second to make a decision; five seconds to put the tape inside the VHS recorder against Will's protests, and three to turn the TV on. Soon the Party could see what was on the recording. And what they saw was chief Hopper making a deal with doctor Brenner.

6. Lando Calrissian

I think that the hardest part about this chapter was writing the Party's reactions; imagining what they would think about Hopper after seeing the tape. I'm still not entirely sure if I succeeded.

Now, the Lando Calrissian comes into play. I need to note that I'm not all that familiar with *Star Wars*... but I refreshed my memory on Lando's actions in Episode 5 and 6.

Anyway, please, leave a review.

Lando Calrissian

The moment Hopper said those words; the moments the meaning behind those words caught up to the boys, Mike clenched his fists. He felt the fury rising inside of him with every second, just like that time when he learned chief forbade Eleven from contacting them. But this time it was worse. This time Mike's wrath was far greater and it was mixed with utter disgust.

Now when his previous theory has been confirmed, Mike couldn't think of anything else but this betrayal. There was no place for doubt in his mind. No place for justifications and questions of any sort. The important part was that Hopper did it.

Will observed his friends with a growing sense of dread... and failure. The Dark Power struck again and Will couldn't prevent its move. Now his friends were open for corruption and might likely turn on chief Hopper soon. Will could, of course, tell them why Hopper did it... but will they listen? Will they believe him?

Meanwhile Lucas stared at the black screen of TV and for the first few seconds couldn't believe what he just saw. No, chief wouldn't... chief *couldn't*... The mere suggestion that this man was able to betray Eleven seemed like something out of this universe. This was the man who tried to protect everyone in the Party and was hiding El for so long to keep her from harm. And right now Eleven was his daughter. How could this man betray her?

But then a thought crossed Lucas' mind: *Unless he had a good reason...* If so, Lucas wanted to know the reason. As much as the recording seemed to be genuine, he much rather wanted to confront chief about it and listen to what he would have to say.

The first thing that went through Dustin's mind was that it must have been some kind of mistake. There was no way the man on the recording was chief. Chief was a badass hero, who was fighting with demodogs, passing further Will's words via his walkie-talkie and keeping everyone safe. It just seemed like someone made this video to show chief Hopper in bad light, but the video itself was fake.

Still, some part of Dustin was discreetly whispering to him: *It is him... He did it...*

Max was also suspicious of the footage on this tape... But then again, she knew about the events with Brenner and Eleven from Lucas' story. Now, when she has seen Brenner on the recording, he seemed to be just a normal man. He seemed so normal, Max had to remind herself that – according to Lucas – he was actually a monster who was experimenting on a little girl.

She knew this was all too suspicious – tape showing up just like that and all...

"Bastard..." Mike whispered under his breath, breaking the uncomfortable silence that transpired.

Max, Lucas and Dustin looked at him with concern. Will, on the other hand, stared at his friend with the expression of hopelessness.

"BASTARD!" Mike exclaimed and even hit the table with rage.

"Calm down, man." Lucas tried to reason with him.

"Yeah. Don't you think it's a little bit suspicious that a tape like that just shows up?" Max supported him.

"Don't you *dare* ignore what we've just seen!" Mike said, pointing at the TV set. "Don't pretend like it didn't happen!"

"Dude," Dustin began. "I know how it looks like, but-"

"But *what?*!" Mike yelled at him. "Brenner and his goons knew we were hiding in school, because *he* told them! He really did tell them where El was!"

"Mike..." Will started.

"And I was helping to find this two-faced son of a bitch when he was stuck underneath!"

"Mike..." This time Will spoke a little louder.

"I wanted to protect him from Saturninus! Well, now he can rot in hell for all I care!"

"Mike, you don't understand..." Will tried once again.

"And what is there to understand?! One does not simply betray the member of the Party! And chief betrayed Eleven! He doesn't deserve to-!"

"HE DID IT TO SAVE ME!" Will screamed, immediately shutting Mike up.

All of them were staring at Will, partly startled by his sudden outburst; and partly longing for what he was going to say next.

Will looked at his friend with sad eyes and explained with shaky voice:

"He told them of El's location, so he and mom could venture into the Upside Down and rescue me."

For a moment Mike was speechless. Suddenly he wasn't as angry with chief Hopper as earlier. Suddenly he was faced with a realization that without this betrayal, Will wouldn't be here. Will was his friend; a friend that was the weakest of all of them and who they were trying to find two years ago. They've almost lost him twice and were glad he was with them. And he was there because of chief Hopper...

So now Mike was torn between his righteous anger and... understanding? No, not quite. Forgiveness? No, they weren't allowed to forgive chief such a sin (this was something only El could do).

Maybe awareness. Yes, it was awareness of Hopper's actions resulting in Will's happy return that was restraining Mike's anger. And the boy felt like his consciousness wanted him to choose: the girl he cared for or his best friend.

Lucas welcomed Will's explanation. This was the reason behind chief Hopper's actions. It didn't make what Hopper did right; it didn't change the fact that chief betrayed one of them, but Lucas felt a little bit better, knowing it was to save Will's life.

Max thought that what chief did was wrong... but he did it to do something good. And well, he probably didn't know Eleven all that well, so he decided to bargain with Brenner. She wondered if she would do the same in his position...

Dustin's mind, on the other hand, was occupied by something entirely different. New information reminded him of something...

"Lando Calrissian." He said, all of a sudden. All eyes turned to him with surprise and he went on: "Back when we were hiding in the abandoned bus and chief contacted us, I've told you that he might be like Lando. We've dismissed it, eventually, but..."

He didn't finish because suddenly the door to the AV Club opened and Herbert looked inside.

"Oh, there you are, guys!" He smiled and entered the room. He closed the door behind himself and added: "I was wondering if you're here or in the lunch room." He stopped talking abruptly, noticing the heavy atmosphere.

His eyes landed on the "To the Party" sign and then turned on the TV. Mike instantly realized that Herbert knew what was going on. He knew this will happen, sooner or later. After all, he said it himself...

I know what I need to know to stop Saturninus.

How did he know? Who was he and his boss that they seemed to know so much about the Party, Hawkins Lab or what Hopper did?

"So," Herbert began, ignoring the stares from the Party. "I've heard you talking about Lando Calrissian. Do you know the answer for my

question?"

Why did Lando Calrissian betray Han Solo? – Suddenly this question seemed to make more sense. Everything Herbert or Adeline were saying to the Party; everything they were doing, served a purpose.

"Cut the crap." Lucas seemed to think the same things as Mike. "We've just seen a recording of chief Hopper making a deal with doctor Brenner. We know Lando is an analogy."

Herbert turned to him and flushed him a wide grin.

"Bravo! I knew you will catch up quickly!" Then his smile weakened and he asked Will: "Did you tell them already?"

"Yes." The boy nodded. "They know why chief did it."

"Well then," Herbert straightened himself. "let's get back to my question: Why Lando Calrissian betrayed Han Solo?"

"It doesn't matter..." Dustin started, but the blonde cut in:

"It does. As I said earlier: This is an important question. Only when you will answer it, we can move on. So I'm asking again: Why Lando Calrissian betrayed Han Solo?"

For a moment neither of them spoke. They just looked at each other, wondering what to do – play Herbert's game or question him further. They knew who is who in this scenario. They knew why Herbert asked about Lando in the first place. They much rather preferred to get straight to the point. But it was like interacting with some kind of wise man, who wanted to talk with them through parables and riddles so they could understand some hidden truths.

"Lando was a governor of Cloud City." Dustin decided to break the silence and indulge Herbert a little. Others turned to him with annoyance, but didn't say anything. Dustin went on: "He wanted it to be free from Empire's jurisdiction."

"So he and Darth Vader made the deal," Lucas continued for him. "Lando will give up Han, Leia and C3PO, while Vader grant Cloud City an autonomy."

"Wait, wait, wait." Max cut in. "Didn't Vader bring army into Cloud City?"

"Yeah, and Lando specifically asked him to not harm his guests." Will added. "Vader made it clear that he needed them because he wanted to know where Luke Skywalker is."

"He... Lando, I mean... should know that Vader can't be trusted." Mike commented wryly. "After all, he was a Sith Lord."

"So what?" Lucas turned to him. "He was supposed to fight him, just like that, and endanger the citizens of Cloud City?"

"He didn't have problem doing that later, when Vader kept changing the deal." Mike retorted.

"Maybe when he had second thoughts, he also made up a plan? How about that?" Dustin said.

"Oh, yes, the second thoughts." Herbert cut in, stopping this discussion before it might become a fan war. With a smile, he continued: "And do you remember what Lando Calrissian did once he realized what he has done? When he heard Han Solo screaming in pain from tortures he was put on? When he was informed that his friend will be frozen in carbonite? When he saw Leia and Chewbacca in chains?"

"He turned on Vader." Dustin replied.

"He helped Leia, Chewie and C3PO escape." Max added.

"And in *Return of the Jedi* he helped rescue Han from Jabba and fought in battle of Endor." Lucas finished.

"Lando Calrissian was never an evil character." Herbert began, not smiling anymore. "His betrayal came from his sense of duty to people of Cloud City. And later he wanted to make up for what he has done, by looking for Han, providing a plan to rescue him and then aiding the Rebels in the fight. He could just leave them at Empire's mercy. In fact, it would be entirely justifiable, if he did. But he felt remorse. And his remorse was so strong, he decided to do something about it."

Suddenly Herbert looked at Mike and added with a serious voice:

"It's incredible what guilt can do to people."

The boy stared back at him, wondering why the blonde directed that last sentence to him.

"Now," Herbert started, once again giving them friendly smile. "since you compared chief Hopper to Lando, ask yourself three questions: What was his Cloud City? Who was his Han, Chewie and Leia? And what was his *Return of the Jedi*?" He got serious and added: "Of course, you know perfectly well who's Vader in that scenario."

The bell announced the beginning of the new lesson.

"Ah, just in time." Herbert returned to be his usual grinning self and just when he put his hand on the doorknob...

"Wait!" Mike called after him.

Herbert only looked at the Party's paladin, who shot him a stern glare and went on:

"What about Eleven? No matter how much you try to convince us about Hopper's remorse, in the end she's the only one who can really forgive him. No one else can grant him mercy but her, because *she* was the one he betrayed in the first place."

Herbert turned his full attention on him and replied:

"You're right. That's why she should know the whole story. And you should too."

"Then tell us the whole story." Lucas retorted.

"Yeah, dude, don't be so cryptic all the time." Dustin agreed.

Herbert gave them a small, almost sad smile.

"It's not my story to tell." He stopped smiling and added: "It's the story of chief Hopper and you should ask *him* about it."

"And why should he tell us?" Max asked. "Who in their right mind would confess something like that to a bunch of kids? Especially friends of someone he wronged?"

"Tell you what." Herbert crossed his arms. "You will go to chief and try to make him talk. If for some reason, he won't be able to tell you, I will do it." He gave them the serious expression and raised his finger warningly. "But only then, understand?"

They nodded in agreement and all six of them finally went to their class.

For the rest of their day in school the Party had hard time focusing on the lessons. After all, they've just learned some heavy stuff about one of their friends and, according to Herbert, there was even more to know. At this point they had to visit chief's cabin, just like Hopper and Mike originally established.

They didn't know how they were supposed to get confession out of him. But they did have some ideas.

"We should trick him to tell us." Dustin said, when they were driving through the forest.

"And how do you want to do it, brainiac?" Max asked. "He can sense lie in a mile."

"I don't know." He shrugged.

"I think we should just tell him we know what he did." Will argued. "But we believe he's a good man and we want to know the whole truth."

"Mike, you better stay quiet." Lucas instructed his friend, who just replied:

"I don't make any promises."

When they got to the cabin, chief's blazer was already parked, indicating that Hopper was home. Mike used the special knock and at first there was only silence on the other side. But then they've heard the sound of unlocked doors. After the Party entered the cabin, they

were greeted with empty room... but suddenly the door to El's room opened and the girl meet them.

She looked scared. There were tears in her eyes, but more importantly, she had a nosebleed. He was clutching to a flannel shirt.

Her first instinct after seeing the Party, was to run to Mike and hug him, still crying.

"El?" The boy asked, a bit confused.

"Mike..."

They broke the embrace and looked at each other.

"What happened, El?"

"Hopper..." She started with shaky voice. "He... he went out and still didn't return. Mike..." New tears ran down her cheeks as she said in a cracking voice, full of worry and despair: "Mike, I can't find him!"